

# Health Trends



A Quarterly Newsletter for the New Mexico VA Health Care System ■ VISN 18

## Veterans Choice Program

**U**nder the recently enacted Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act, many Veterans now have the option to receive non-VA health care rather than waiting for a VA appointment or traveling to a VA facility.

This new Choice Program covers non-VA care for eligible Veterans enrolled in VA healthcare. As a Veteran, you're eligible if any of these situations apply to you:

- You've been told by your local VA facility that you'll need to wait more than 30 days from your preferred date or the date medically determined by your physician;
- Your current residence is more than 40 miles from the closest VA health care facility;
- You need to travel by plane or boat to the VA medical facility nearest your home;
- You face a geographic challenge, such as long distances around water or mountains.

The VA has mailed eligible Veterans a letter and Choice Card with details about the program. If you've received your Choice Card, or if you believe you qualify



but have not received it, please call the VA at 866-606-8198 for confirmation, and to get started.

When you call, please have the name of your preferred non-VA health care provider available, plus information about any other health insurance coverage you may have. Then we'll walk you through the following steps:

- You'll be asked to enter your ZIP code, and first and last name.
- We'll confirm your eligibility.
- We'll check which of your needs are covered by the VA.
- We'll ask for your address

and the name of your preferred non-VA provider. Unfortunately, not all providers will be covered so if your preferred provider is not available, we'll recommend others in your area.

- We'll then work with you to schedule an appointment.

This hotline is exclusively for making sure you're eligible for the Choice Program and setting up a non-VA care appointment. If you have questions about other aspects of your VA medical care or want to learn more about enrolling in VA health services, please call 1-877-222-VETS or visit [www.va.gov/health](http://www.va.gov/health). ■

## VA to Pilot IBM Technology Program

The VA has begun a two-year pilot to study innovative means to quickly search electronic medical records and medical literature for relevant published studies. During the pilot, VA will assess how the technology may speed up clinical decisions.

“A tool that can help a clinician quickly collect, combine, and present information will allow them to spend more time listening and interacting with the Veteran,” said Interim Under Secretary for Health Carolyn M. Clancy, M.D. This directly supports the patient-centric medicine VA is committed to delivering every day.”

The IBM Corporation was selected to provide the system, which uses its “Watson technology” made famous on Jeopardy! in 2011. Today, IBM is working with several healthcare organizations to apply Watson’s capabilities in helping doctors identify and analyze cancer treatment options.

Learning about the opportunities and challenges these technologies may have is part of an ongoing effort for VA to advance the quality of healthcare provided to our nation’s Veterans. ■

## Volunteers Play a Key Role in Serving Veterans

The Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) was founded in 1946 to provide for our nation’s Veterans while they are cared for by VA health care facilities. Today, it’s one of the largest centralized volunteer programs in the Federal government.

More than 7400 national and community organizations support VAVS, and volunteers have provided over 760 million hours of service since its founding. Last year alone, volunteers contributed more than 11.3 million hours of service to Veterans. The vast majority of VA volunteers work at VA hospitals, but volunteers also assist VA national cemeteries and regional benefits offices.

At medical centers, their roles range from traditional ones, such as escorting patients and



assisting in recreation activities, to nontraditional assignments outside of medical centers, in such programs as hospice care and home-based primary care. Opportunities for medical center volunteers also exist in patient education, advocacy and services supporting patient care.

At cemeteries, volunteers provide military honors at burial services, plant trees and flowers, and place flags on graves for Memorial Day and Veterans Day.

### *Becoming a Volunteer*

Anyone interested in becoming a VAVS volunteer can do so in one of two ways:

1. Contact the Department of Veterans Affairs facility nearest you. Ask for Voluntary Service. Tell the staff of your interest in becoming a VAVS Volunteer. The staff will take care of everything else, including your interview, orientation, and assignment! To find the facility nearest you, go to the following website <http://www.volunteer.va.gov/>, and click on the “Volunteer and Donate” link.
2. Or fill out the Volunteer Now! form on the same site. Someone from your local VAVS office will contact you with additional information. ■

# To Control Your Weight – It's Your MOVE!

If you're carrying extra weight, losing weight and keeping it off can be one of the best things you can do to protect your health. Excess weight puts you at risk for problems like heart disease, diabetes, some cancers, sleep apnea and gallstones. The best way to manage your weight is to eat wisely and be as physically active as possible. MOVE!® and your VA healthcare team can help you at every step along the way to healthy living and a healthy weight.

MOVE!® is a weight self-management program for Veterans who want to improve their health. The first step is to let your VA Primary Care team know you're interested in MOVE!

## Next Steps

1. Your VA Primary Care Team will encourage you to complete the MOVE!11 Questionnaire. You can

complete this at the VA, or you can do this now at [www.move.va.gov/mov23.asp](http://www.move.va.gov/mov23.asp).

2. The MOVE!11 produces a report based on your answers to help identify your specific needs. Print your report and take it with you to your next primary care visit.
3. The team will help you set some initial goals, such as how much total weight you want to lose, how much you want to lose each week, and your plans for increasing activity and decreasing calories.
4. With your team's guidance, you can choose from a wide range of support options available at your facility.

## Group Sessions

This is one of the most effective ways to develop your weight

management skills. Most programs offer a course of 10 sessions over several weeks. Working on managing your weight can be fun, lively, and a great way to learn from the healthcare staff and other Veterans.

## Telephone Support

Working with your primary care or MOVE!® team members by telephone.

## TeleMOVE!

Home Messaging provides daily written messages using a device connected to your home telephone.

## Interactive Voice Response

Interactive Voice Response provides audio coaching messages using your home or cellular phone. Both versions of TeleMOVE! are supported by a Care Coordinator who monitors your progress and calls you as needed. ■

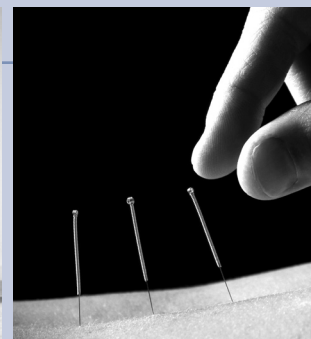
# Alternative Medicines

There was a time when yoga classes at a VA hospital would have seemed as out of place as poetry readings during boot camp.

Times have changed. Nowadays, yoga is just one of several complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) practices that have caught on big at VA. Meditation and acupuncture are two more. According to a 2011 survey, nearly nine of 10 VA facilities offered at least one CAM therapy.

More research on CAM is now underway in VA, thanks in part to a recent joint effort involving VA and the National Institutes of Health. The agencies are providing \$21.7 million over five years for 13 new projects focused on non-drug approaches to treating PTSD, drug abuse, and sleep issues.

All in all, it seems that CAM is indeed an idea whose time has



come. And VA is playing an important role by conducting rigorous research to show what works and what doesn't, and then applying those findings into Veterans' care. ■



## Spring 2015

If you are a Veteran who is currently smoking and would like to learn ways to stop this habit, help is available through the New Mexico VA Health Care System. Please contact your primary care provider and request a consultation to the Smoking Cessation Program. **HealthTrends** is designed to provide general health and wellness information and news about services provided by VISN 18. **HealthTrends** is not intended as a substitute for professional medical advice, which should be obtained from your health care provider.

### To Change Your Address

Contact Benefits and Eligibility at **505-265-1711, ext. 2741**.  
Out-of-town patients, please call **800-465-8262, ext. 2741**.

### Patient Concerns or Issues

please contact our patient advocates at  
**505-265-1711, ext. 2612 or 2686**.  
Out-of-town patients, please call  
**800-465-8262, ext. 2612 or 2686**.

[www.albuquerque.va.gov](http://www.albuquerque.va.gov)

## New Mexico VA Health Care System

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# HealthTrends

## Shedding Light on Low Vision Problems

Is your eyesight no longer as clear as it once was? The New Mexico VA Health Care System (NMVAHCS) has a special clinic to identify and correct low vision conditions affecting Veterans. We can train you in the use of devices and visual techniques which may allow you to continue to read, watch television and perform other visual tasks.

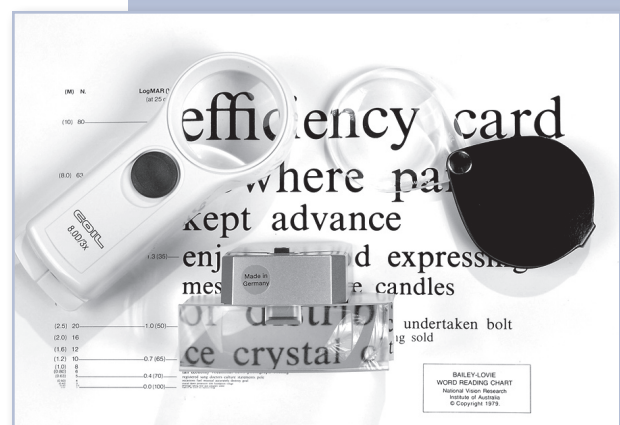
Dr. Robert Crammer, Low Vision Optometrist, and Michelle Bayan, Low Vision Therapist, assist Veterans with vision problems every day at the Low Vision Clinic at the Raymond G. Murphy VA Medical Center in Albuquerque. The clinic was recently accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Rehabilitation Facilities (CARF), which is the gold standard for reviewing these programs. In a recent patient survey, Veterans gave the clinic high marks.

A loss of vision can have a major impact on your ability to perform routine activities of daily living.

That may include problems reading, recognizing faces, paying bills, writing checks and taking care of personal finances, and participating in hobbies. Vision loss also can have a profound effect on your mobility, such as the loss of ability to drive. A major problem for elderly Veterans may be the inability to self-medicate, because they can't read the labels on medicine bottles.

Eye exams are geared toward identifying your visual goals (e.g. - reading the newspaper and medication labels, watching TV), and assessing your current vision. The next steps include recommendation, evaluation and training with optical and non-optical devices and visual techniques, which may assist in reaching identified goals with your remaining usable vision.

Optometrists evaluate decreased



distance and near vision, central and peripheral vision loss, reduced contrast sensitivity, and other problems. We may prescribe various low vision devices. They include specialized lens designs and prescriptions, magnifiers, prismatic eyeglasses, telescopes, special lighting, tints and filters, plus non-optical and electronic devices.

If you've been diagnosed with visual impairment, you may benefit from Low Vision Clinic services. Consider asking your eye doctor or Primary Care Provider to refer you to the Low Vision Clinic. ■